

Sociology 187Q – Fall 2009
Cultural Sociology

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Mondays 3-5:20, Wilson 303
OH: Mondays 1-3

The Sociology of Culture, or Cultural Sociology, is a vibrant subfield within sociology that has gained increased distinction since the 1980s. At its core Cultural Sociology is not so much about a defined object of study (such as “material culture” or “popular culture”) as much as about *a way of studying social objects and processes in a way that takes culture into account*. Cultural Sociologists may study subcultures or media reception, but may just as well study race, the state, or social movements, albeit in a “cultural way.” This course is an introduction to studying the social world in a cultural way, and to the varied meanings culture takes in the current prominent approaches in Cultural Sociology today.

Cultural Sociology in its current incarnation is distinctively North American and emerges out of a distancing from earlier functionalist theories as well as from Cultural Studies, though certainly drawing from both. The course begins with an assessment of the state of the field, followed by a brief introduction to some classical statements on culture and some contemporary programmatic statements. We then follow with several, thematically arranged substantive investigations, ranging from studies of community-making in churches, to the study of working class and underclass black subjectivities, among others. A central theme we explore in this course is the dual role of culture in producing togetherness while simultaneously producing distinctions and hierarchies.

As an introduction to the field, this course seeks to accomplish three things: 1. Offer a contemporary picture of the state of cultural sociology; 2. Offer an overview of some of the main concepts and methods in use, and 3. Explore some exemplary contemporary works and place them in their intellectual context. For graduate students taking the preliminary exam in cultural sociology, this course offers a solid foundation. Although an introductory course, we opt here for covering a few select topics well rather than attempt to completely cover every facet of cultural sociology, and certainly will not do justice to all substantive areas under the rubric of cultural sociology. It is my hope, however, that having taken this course you will be able to approach these various substantive areas with ease.

This is a reading (rather than writing) course, with a significant reading load. Its requirements are reading/attendance/participation, weekly memos, and a short final project.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

This is a reading-intensive course and you should plan on spending **several hours a week** in reading for this course, and you should realistically assess the workload of this course before deciding to take it. You are expected to come to class having done the all reading and ready to actively participate in discussion.

Note for Graduate Students in the course: I prefer full participation in the course and discourage auditing of particular weeks. I also expect that you will do significant portions of the recommended readings each week.

It is not assumed that students have some background in cultural sociology, but it is assumed that you have a basic working background in social theory. Some of the recommended readings for the first class session can go a long way to provide some extra background for those who feel they need it.

One of the goals of this course is to impart the basic background in cultural sociology as well as a practical proficiency in reading and discussing cultural sociological texts. *The* most important requirements of this course are that you read the materials each week closely, carefully, and thoughtfully, and that you attend class as an active participant. Some of the weeks have more reading than others – the reading load generally varies inversely with its difficulty. In addition to general attendance/participation you will be expected to write weekly memos, prepare presentation(s) to the class, and do a group project as well as a final project. Since this is a reading course with a very intensive reading load, the final project is relatively less demanding than in a traditional seminar. Instead of a full-fledged research paper you are expected to write a shorter, more focused project. My suggestion for it is below. My assumptions in making the paper smaller and of lesser importance in the overall grade scheme is that you will devote your energies to careful reading (and thinking).

- **Memos (50 percent of final grade).** Before 6pm on Sundays (that is, the day before the seminar meeting), submit to the seminar distribution list an analytical memo of no more than 600-1,000 words. Comment succinctly on what you found most interesting, important, puzzling, infuriating, fundamental, etc. about the readings. Distributed over email in a timely manner, these abstracts will not only help you organize your response to the readings but will also serve as a guide for discussions. At least four times during the semester you should write your response as if it were a book review in a journal, based on the style and format of standard reviews in sociology journals. Altogether, these short written assignments contribute fifty percent to your final grade.
- **Critical reviews / class presentations (30 percent of final grade).** In groups of 2-3 you will write and distribute in class a discussion guide for the week's reading in which you briefly summarize some of the key ideas of the readings and offer some guiding questions for discussion. The discussion guide will also contain a dictionary of key terms used by the

authors as well as a summary of questions submitted to the email list. You will then briefly present some themes for discussion in the first **fifteen minutes** of class (this is a firm limit); you should **not** read your discussion guide, or feel each member of your group needs to present. Your presentation could consist of identifying particularly problematic passages in the text, contextualizing the debates implicit or explicit in the text, or preparing specific questions for discussion. I expect you to take some time preparing this presentation. In some of the weeks your group will then follow up the class discussion with an email “interview” with the author in question, which you will then distribute to the class list.

- **Final Project (20 percent of the grade).** Since the goal of this course is to prepare you to specialize in cultural sociology, the final short project should fit with this general purpose. By the middle of October you will give me a one- page proposal for what your project will be. It should fit within your general coursework and intellectual trajectory. It could be a ten page theory section of your comps or dissertation proposal in which you engage some of the authors in question on a concept or theory relevant to your research. I will give you close feedback on this short project.

REQUIRED BOOKS:

- Ann Swidler. *Talk of Love.*
- Jeffrey Alexander. *The Meanings of Social Life.*
- Lyn Spillman. *Cultural Sociology*
- Al Young. *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men.*
- Paul Lichterman. *Elusive Togetherness*
- Michele Lamont. *The Dignity of Working Men.*
- Philip Smith. *Why War? The Cultural Logic of Iraq, the Gulf War, and Suez.*
- *The New Spirit of Capitalism (Paperback)* by Luc Boltanski; Eve Chiapello (Author)
- Francesca Polletta. *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics.*
- Wendy Griswold. *Bearing Witness.* Princeton University Press. 2000.

READINGS AND DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

Part I: Concepts, Theories, and Programs

September 7th: Introduction to the Course.

No required readings.

Recommended (If you have not taken social theory):

Karl Marx. Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. 1947 *The German Ideology* (New York:

International Publishers), esp. Marx's preface (1-2), "Feuerbach" (3-78), and "Theses on Feuerbach" (195-99)

Durkheim, Emile. 1965 [1915]. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press). (Reading: See especially: "Introduction" (1-33) "Origins of These Beliefs--end" (235- 72), "The Negative Cult and Its Functions--the Ascetic Rites" (337-365), and "Conclusion" (462-96).)

Weber, Max. 1958 (1904-5). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner), esp. "The Spirit of Capitalism" (47-78) and "Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism" (155-83).

Weber, Max. 1958 ["The Social Psychology of the World Religions." In H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford), 267-301.

Parsons, Talcott, and Edward Shils. 1951. "Values, Motives, and Systems of Actions," in Parsons and Shils (eds.), *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Harvard U Press), 53-79.

Week 2. September 14th: The State of the Field. In this set of introductory readings a number of authors lay out their vision for the current state of affairs in cultural sociology. How has US cultural sociology evolved in the last two decades? How has the concept of culture evolved? How does it relate to classical sociological theory?

Required:

- (1) Introduction: The Meanings of (Social) Life: On the Origins of a Cultural Sociology" and "Chapter 1: The Strong Program in Cultural Sociology: Elements of a Structural Hermeneutics (with Phillip Smith)" in Jeffrey Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life* "Introduction: Culture and Cultural Sociology" in Lyn Spillman, *Cultural Sociology*.
- (2) Crane, Diana. 1994. "Introduction: the Challenge of the Sociology of Culture to Sociology As a Discipline." Pp. 1-20 in *The Sociology of Culture: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives*, Edited by Diana Crane. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell. *
- (3) Kaufman, Jason. 2004. "Endogenous Explanation in the Sociology of Culture. *Annual Review of Sociology* 30.*
- (4) Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1984):126-166.*

Recommended:

Smith, Philip. 1998. "The New American Cultural Sociology: An Introduction." Pp. 1-14 in *The New American Cultural Sociology*, Edited by Philip Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Michele Lamont and Robert Wuthnow, "Betwixt and Between: Recent Cultural Sociology in Europe and the United States," pp. 287-315 in George Ritzer (ed.), Frontiers of Social Theory: The New Synthesis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, "Introduction: Rethinking Popular Culture," pp. 1-61 in Mukerji and Schudson (eds.), Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

William Sewell, Jr. "The Concept(s) of Culture," pp. 35-61 in Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (eds.), Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999)

Wuthnow, Robert W. M. 1988. "New Directions in the Study of Culture ." *Annual Review of Sociology* 14:49-67.

Week 3. September 14th. What culture is and what it does: Classical Statements. In this week we read some of the influential classical pieces on culture as a set of meanings and/or a set of collective symbols, and which in some versions performs an integrative function. The Geertz reading is a key pivotal text that connects the earlier, anthropological versions, with more contemporary practice-theories. Becker's piece is a nice application that draws on some of these earlier notions. Again, you will query these texts for changing definitions of culture and its role in social life.

(1) Emile Durkheim & Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification*, pp. 3-27, 81-88*

(2) Norbert Elias. *The History of Manners (or The Development of Manners)* Ch. 1 in *The Civilizing Process**

(3) Simmel, Georg. 1971. Georg Simmel. "On the Concept and Tragedy of Culture" and "Sociological Aesthetics" (K. Peter Etkorn, *The Conflict in Modern Culture*) *

(4) Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in Spillman,

(5) Ruth Benedict. "The Diversity of Cultures" in Spillman.

(6) Becker, Howard, "Becoming a Marijuana User," American Journal of Sociology, 59 (1953), pp. 235–242. *

(7) Parsons, Talcott. "Some Sociological Aspects of Fascist Movements" in Social Forces 21 (2), 1942. *

Recommended:

Simmel, Georg. 1971. "Subjective Culture" ([1908], 227-34), "Fashion" [1904], 294- 323]), and "The Conflict in Modern Culture" ([1918], 375-93), reprinted in Donald Levine (ed.), Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms (University of Chicago).

Emile Durkheim. The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. Introduction and Book One pp. 1-45 ; Ch. Conclusion: pp. 418-48

Douglas, Mary. 1986. How Institutions Think. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press).

Bergesen, Albert J. 1977. "Political Witch-Hunts: The Sacred and the Subversive in Cross-National Perspective," American Sociological Review 42: 220-233.

Barthes, Roland, "The World of Wrestling," in Mythologies (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), pp. 115–125.

Week 4: September 21st Classical Statements on Culture (2): Critical Theory. If North American sociology of culture explicitly draws on Durkheim and on notions of collective representations, it is also influenced by Marxian and similar critical versions of culture as a collective mis-representation, or as an ideology. While Gramsci is assigned as a required reading, I'd recommend focusing on readings 1-4, as they are less likely to be known. In what ways do these texts bear similarities to those of the week before?

(1) Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," pp. 217–252 in Illuminations (New York: Schocken, 1968)*

(2) Mannheim, Karl. 1928. "Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon." Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge (New York: Oxford, 1952), 191-229. ‡ Reprinted in Kurt H. Wolff (ed.), From Karl Mannheim (New York: Oxford, 1971), 223-261.*

- (3) Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Spillman, ed.
- (4) Raymond Williams. 1980. "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (Verso / NLB), 31-49 in Spillman, ed.
- (5) Raymond Williams, "Culture." In Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society* Expanded edition. (London: Fontana, 1988).*
- (6) Antonio Gramsci, "Culture and Ideological Hegemony," in: Alexander and Seidman, *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*, pp. 47–54.*

Recommended:

Andreas Huyssen. "Introduction to Adorno" in *New German Critique* no.6 1975

Raymond Williams, "Culture." In Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society* Expanded edition. (London: Fontana, 1988).

Gramsci, Antonio. 2000. "Prison Writings, 1929-1935: "Hegemony, Relations of Force, Historical Bloc." *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, Edited by David Forgacs. New York: New York University Press. Pp. 189-221. Available on line at www.marxists.org

"Some Aspects of The Southern Question", "Notes on Italian History," "State and Civil Society," and "Americanism and Fordism," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp.44-120; pp.210-228; pp.277-318.

Mouffe, Chantal. 1979. "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," pp. 168-204 in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, edited by Chantal Mouffe. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Biagio de Giovanni, "Lenin and Gramsci: state, politics and party", pp. [] in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, edited by Chantal Mouffe. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Part II: Contemporary Approaches

Week 5: September 28th. Cultural Production and Institutional Fields. Sociological accounts of cultural production are often in implicit debate with critical theory. For this week, re-read Horkheimer and Adorno, Williams and Benjamin before tackling

these readings. How are sociological accounts different?

Wendy Griswold. *Bearing Witness*. Entire.

- (1) Wendy Griswold, "A Methodological Framework for the Sociology of Culture," Sociological Methodology (1988): 1-35.*
- (2) Howard Becker, "Art Worlds" in Spillman, ed.
- (3) Magali Larson, "Beyond the Post-Modern Façade" in Spillman, ed.

Week 6: October 5th. How Culture Works: Collective Meanings. This week is dedicated to Swidler's recent book on love and her approach to culture, which we might characterize as revolving around collective meanings. In addition, we read two different pieces that rely on akin conceptions. How do individuals hold culture and are held by it in these conceptions? How does culture both create divisions and collectivities? How do each of the authors study culture?

Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love*. Entire

- (1) Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," American Sociological Review 51 (April 1986): 273-286. *
- (2) Author meets critics session on Talk of Love. *Culture* 18:2 (Winter, 2004). Online from ASA. *
- (3) Michael Schudson, "How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols," Theory and Society 18 (1989):153-180. (Abridged version in the Spillman Reader)
- (4) Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith. "The Discourse of American Civil Society: A New Proposal for Cultural Studies." In Alexander, *Meanings of Social Life*. (The original is at: *Theory and Society* 22:2 (Apr., 1993), pp. 151-207.)

October 12th- No Class

Week 8: October 19th. How Culture Works (2): Principles of Vision and Division. This and the next few sessions are dedicated to what might be described as Bourdieu's version of sociology of culture. How does it differ from Swidler's version? How does it draw on different and similar inspirations?

- (1) Pierre Bourdieu 'Men and Machines' in Cicourel, ed. pp 304-317*
- (2) Pierre Bourdieu "Social Space and Symbolic Power," in *Sociological Theory*, pp 14-27*
- (3) Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society* 14. JSTOR. *

- (4) Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Power" in Spillman.
- (5) Social Class, Cultural Repertoires, and Popular Culture: The Case of Film. Lisa A. Barnett and Michael Patrick Allen. *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Mar., 2000), pp. 145-163*
- (6) Fantasia, Rick, "Fast Food in France," *Theory and Society* (1995), 24:201-243*
- (7) Bethany Bryson. "Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes" in Spillman, ed.
- (8) Democracy versus Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 113, No. 1 (Jul., 2007), pp. 165-204*

Recommended:

David Swartz. Drawing Inspiration from Bourdieu's Sociology of Symbolic Power. *Theory and Society* 32-5/6 (2003): 519-528.

Richard Peterson and Roger Kern, "Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore." *ASR* 61:5 (October, 1996): 900-907.

Nicola Beisel, "Morals Versus Art: Censorship, The Politics of Interpretation, and the Victorian Nude." *American Sociological Review* 58:2 (Apr., 1993), pp. 145-162.

Bonnie H. Erickson, "Culture, Class, and Connections." *American Journal of Sociology* 102 (July 1996):217-251

Paul DiMaggio, "Classification in Art," *American Sociological Review* 52 (August 1987): 440-455.

Douglas B. Holt, 1997. "Distinction in America? Recovering Bourdieu's Theory of Taste from its Critics." *Poetics*. 25: 93-120.

Gross, Neil. 2002. "Becoming a Pragmatist Philosopher: Status, Self-Concept, and Intellectual Choice." *American Sociological Review* 67: 52-76. link

Breiger, Ronald L., "A Tool-kit for Practice Theory," *Poetics*, 27 (2000), pp. 91- 115.

Week 9: October 26th. This week's session is dedicated to Lamont's "symbolic boundaries" extension of Bourdieu, as instantiated in her recent book on working class identities in the US and France.

Michele Lamont. *The Dignity of Working Men*. Entire.

- (1) Lamont on Symbolic boundaries in Spillman, ed.
- (2) "Looking back at Bourdieu," by Michèle Lamont Forthcoming in *Cultural Analysis and Bourdieu's Legacy: Settling Accounts and Developing Alternatives*, (eds) Elizabeth Silva and Alan Warde, London: Routledge.*
- (3) "Introduction" in Michele Lamont and Laurent Thevenot, eds.. *Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology: Repertoires of Evaluation in France and the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).*

Part III: Applications of Cultural Sociology: Race, War, the Economy

Week 10: November 2nd : Understanding race through a cultural lens. Al Young's new book on black underclass habitus is the central reading this week, and it is set in the context of the discussion on race, rather than on sociology of culture. How does his approach borrow and extend earlier conceptions we have discussed and how is it different than the other readings in this section?

Al Young, *Marginalized*, entire.

- (1) Hunt, Darnell. 2002 [1997] "Raced Ways of Seeing," in Spillman (2002),
- (2) William Julius Wilson, 1996. *When Work Disappears. The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Vintage. Chapter. 3.*
- (3) Aihwa Ong, 1996. "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States." *Current Anthropology* 37 (5): 737-762. *
- (4) Douglas Hartmann on Race and Culture, in *Sociology of Culture Newsletter*. Online.*

Recommended:

Ruben G. Rumbaut, 1997. "Assimilation and its Discontents: Between Rhetoric and Reality." *International Migration Review*. 31 (4).

Adrian Favell. 1997. "Citizenship and Immigration: Pathologies of a Progressive Philosophy." *New Community* 23 (2): 173-195.

Bonnie L. Mitchell and Joe R. Feagin, 1995. "America's Racial-Ethnic Cultures: Opposition within a Mythical Melting Pot." Pp. 65-86 in *Toward the Multicultural University*, edited by Benjamin P. Bowser, Terry Jones and Gale

Auletta Yougn. Westport: Praeger.

Ruth Frankenberg, 1993. *The Social Construction of Whiteness. White Women, Race Matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Chapter 7.

Week 11: November 9th . Understanding the Cultural Logic of War.

Phil Smith. *Why War?* Entire.

Week 12: November 16th . The New Economy as a Culture

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Selections
TBA

Part IV: Applications (2): Social Movements and the Public Sphere

Week 13: Nov 23: Culture and Movements:

Francesca Poletta. *It was like a Fever*. Entire

- (1) Calhoun, C.1993 "Civil Society and the Public Sphere." *Public Culture* 5:267-280.*
- (2) Mabel Berezin. 1997. 'Politics and Culture: A less fissured Terrain.' In *Annual Review of Sociology**
- (3) Rhys Williams. "Constructing the Public Good: Social Movements and Cultural Resources" in Spillman, ed.
- (4) Gianpaolo Baiocchi. 2003. Emergent Public Spheres. *American Sociological Review*. February.*

Week 14: November 30th . In this section, we consider Lichterman's book on togetherness in churches as the central text on the wide-ranging debate on the nature of the public sphere and how culture facilitates or impedes the intersubjectivity it requires. We also consider three pieces that draw on Alexander's "codes" approach (mine, and the pieces by Ku and Jacobs).

- (1) Paul Lichterman. *Elusive Togetherness*, entire.
- (2) Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman. "Culture in Interaction." *American Journal of Sociology* 108:4 (Jan2003), p735, 60p *

Recommended:

Jurgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

Nina Eliasoph, " 'Close to Home': The Work of Avoiding Politics." *Theory and*

Society 26:5 (Oct., 1997), pp. 605-647. [link](#)

Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Mimi Sheller. 1999. "Publics in History." *Theory and Society*:145-197.

Paul Lichterman 1999. "Talking Identity in the Public Sphere: Broad Visions and Small Spaces in Sexual Identity Politics." *Theory and Society* 28:101-141.

Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." Pp 109-142 in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun. Cambridge: MIT Press

Boggs, Carl 1997 "The great retreat: Decline of the public sphere in late twentieth-century America." *Theory and Society* 26:741-780.

Week 14: December 7th. A contemporary programmatic intervention. The final class session is devoted to Alexander's recent theoretical intervention that extends his earlier framework and develops a dramaturgical approach to cultural sociology.

Jeffrey Alexander. *The Meanings of Social Life*, remaining chapters

- (1) Ronald Jacobs, "Civil Society and Crisis: Culture, Discourse, and the Rodney King Beating," *AJS* 101:5 (March, 1996), 1238-1272. *
- (2) Gianpaolo Baiocchi. "Cultural Codes and the Public Sphere: Crises in Brazil" in *Sociological Theory*. *
- (3) Ku, Agnes S. 1998 "Boundary Politics in the Public Sphere: Openness, Secrecy, and Leak." *Sociological Theory* 16:172-192.*